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Tense / Aspect Category in Fluent and Non-Fluent Polish and German Aphasia

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Objectives & Background

The aim of this study is to describe the linguistic performance regarding sentence comprehension and production of tense/aspect category in fluent and non-fluent German and Polish aphasia. As the category of aspect is reflected in German via tense morphology (Van Hout et al., 2005; Musan, 2001), the difference between the ongoing action (Präsens→Imperfektiv) and the completed past action (Perfekt→Perfektiv) was tested (Wischer & Habermann, 2004). In Polish, it is derivational morphology which signals aspect change within the same temporal frame. Thus, the perfective aspect is realized by means of regular prefixes, whereas the imperfective might be expressed with the use of *internal* prefixes (Grzegorzczkova et al., 1998).

Special interest is taken in observing any differences or similarities in aspect processing in fluent and non-fluent aphasia.

Methods

Four tasks were designed:

- Auditory comprehension task
- Sentence completion task
- Oral production task
- Semantic-ordering task

We used 38 and 45 pictures in German and Polish, respectively. The drawings were randomised. The last non-linguistic task functioned as a cognitive control tool where patients were asked to put the future, present and past activities in a proper order.

All tasks were carried out with the control groups and no significant error patterns were noted.

Results

Four patients (2 German / 2 Polish) were tested. In the case of German patients, the significant difference regarding correct aspect application was observed. The Broca's aphasic patient committed morphological errors in production tasks, whereas the Wernicke's patient confused aspect in both production tasks and in the comprehension one. Two corresponding Broca's and Wernicke's Polish patients showed no significant error patterns in the oral production task. However, for the Wernicke's individual, the significant difference was noted for the aspect errors in the comprehension task.

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Discussion

We believe that “aspect mixed up” phenomenon cannot be explained only in terms of the complexity of German verbal morphology since the imperfective present forms were replaced by the morphologically more complex perfective items. The non-fluent German patient did not have problems with the proper choice of aspect. In Polish, the erroneous aspect application continued through all the tasks only in the case of the Wernicke's aphasic patient, which might imply rather morphosemantic than morphosyntactic problems with aspect differentiation in fluent aphasia.

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